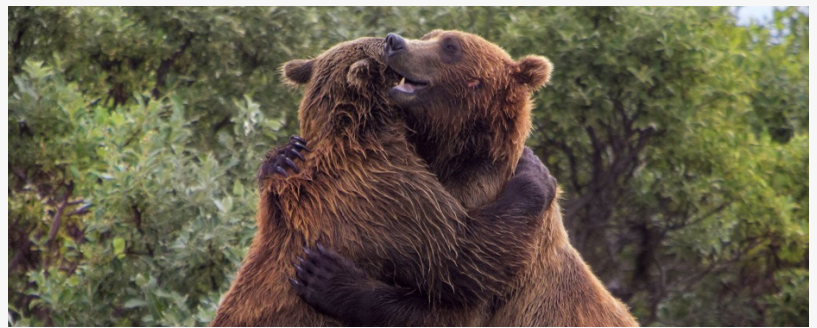


Animal Welfare Groups Applaud Ban on Bear Baiting on National Preserves in Alaska

But groups decry NPS, in a final rule, jettisoning other key provisions to reduce the state's intensive management of bears, wolves on its lands

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, July 1, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy applauded a provision in a final rulemaking action issued last

week by the National Park Service (NPS) relating to wildlife management in Alaska's national preserves that bans the unsporting and dangerous practice of using attractants such as bacon grease, pastries, syrup or dog food as bait in hunting black and brown bears.



“

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Wayne Pacelle, President of Animal Wellness Action

Baiting involves setting out a pile of food for a bear and then shooting the animal while feeding, violating all norms and expressed strictures from federal wildlife managers stipulating that private citizens should not feed bears and habituate them to human food sources. The Alaska Board of Game allows bear baiting in most game management units throughout the state and has promoted that hunting method on national preserves over the outspoken objections of wildlife managers with the National Park Service.

“Bear baiting violates every norm of wildlife management — dumping jelly doughnuts, meat scraps, and grease in

piles or in barrels and then shooting a bear while the animal is gorging on the artificial food source,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. “Bear baiting shouldn’t be allowed anywhere, least of all on lands managed by the National Park Service. It’s unsporting, foul, and dangerous.” Pacelle led winning ballot measures to ban bear baiting over the last generation in Colorado, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington.

While lauding the ban on bear baiting, animal welfare groups criticized the NPS for excising other provisions from its proposed rulemaking that would have restricted other unsporting hunting practices and other forms of intensive predator control or predator reduction on nearly 21 million acres of lands managed by the National Park Service.

Extreme predator-killing policies have been pushed over decades by the Alaska Board of Game to boost moose and caribou populations, by allowing private citizens to kill large numbers of wolves and bears by almost any means, including killing of wolves during their denning season, land-and-shoot hunting, baiting, bear hounding, and other methods considered by responsible hunters and animal welfare advocates to be unethical and inhumane.

There's been a tremendous amount of back and forth on predator-killing policies in Alaska, with the NPS under the Obama Administration backing efforts to exclude intensive predator-killing practices from national preserves. [The 2015 NPS Rulemaking on Hunting and Trapping in National Preserves](#) was adopted to exclude the application of those retrograde state policies on key lands managed by the National Park Service. The Trump Administration and some powerful politicians within the Alaska Congressional delegation countered that effort and wiped out that 2015 rulemaking with a new rulemaking of its own. [That Trump-era rule was finalized in 2020](#) but successfully challenged in court by wildlife-protection groups.

The proposed rulemaking by the Biden Administration, partly a response to the 2022 ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Sharon Gleason, was an attempt to restore the original 2015 rule to limit extreme and unsporting methods. But the NPS [backtracked in its final rulemaking](#), retaining its originally proposed ban on bear baiting but denuding it of restrictions on other sport hunting practices "at this time," indicating that the NPS "may re-evaluate whether regulatory action is necessary in the future."

The NPS policy guidelines explicitly state that the agency "does not engage in activities to reduce the numbers of native species for the purpose of increasing the numbers of harvested species (i.e. predator control) ..." ([9] 2006 NPS Management Policies 4.4.3). It was on that basis that 71 scientists and professional wildlife managers wrote to the NPS and urged it to restore the core elements of the Obama Administration's 2015 rulemaking.

"Although we endorse the new proposed rule, we recommend that NPS strengthen it to more clearly establish that the NPS need not defer to State of Alaska hunting and trapping regulations of any kind in cases where the NPS finds such deference to be inconsistent with their mandates under its Organic Act and subsequent policies and guidelines," wrote the professional wildlife managers.

Also supporting the original rulemaking — which had included key protections beyond the bear-baiting ban — was former two-term Alaska Gov. Tony Knowles, who has long opposed land-and-shooting hunting of wolves and other intensive-killing methods targeting bears and wolves and rejected the intensive-management mandates from the state legislature. There was a national

outcry starting in the 1990s when Gov. Walter Hickel and his Board of Game unleashed an assault on wolves in Alaska. A set of governors succeeding Knowles, including Frank Murkowski, embraced the intensive game management practices that Hickel launched, setting up the fight between the National Park Service and the state.

"It's almost laughable to hear the claims of greatly extending hunting seasons or eliminating season limits, expanding or eliminating bag limits, allowing killing denning wolves and pups and hibernating bears and cubs, and using human food and garbage for bait is not predator control but just an important part of states' rights," wrote Gov. Knowles in his comments supporting the original Biden rulemaking in 2023. "Also claims that a Supreme Court decision of narrowly defining navigable state rivers as the basis for statewide wildlife management on Federal lands is equally false."

This is not the first time that the Biden Administration's Interior Department leaders have stepped back from taking comprehensive and consistent action on matters of important national wildlife policy. Last year, the Biden Administration's Fish and Wildlife Service determined that the use of lead ammunition in sport hunting was detrimental to wildlife and at odds with its mandate to protect wildlife on national wildlife refuges. But it chose to restrict the use of lead ammunition on just eight refuges out of more than 500 in the system.

"This is an Administration that routinely caves to political pressure on wildlife protection policy and often retreats from sound and humane wildlife management principles," added Pacelle. "It's significant and positive that the Biden team has banned bear baiting on national preserves in Alaska, but it's a lost opportunity for the National Park Service to forego its responsibility to exclude intensive management of wolves and bears on lands set aside specifically to protect these species from ruthless and discredited killing strategies."

ABOUT

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) whose mission is to help animals by promoting laws and regulations at federal, state and local levels that forbid cruelty to all animals. The group also works to enforce existing anti-cruelty and wildlife protection laws. Animal Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all. X: @AWAction_News

The Center for a Humane Economy is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(3) whose mission is to help animals by helping forge a more humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty and the degradation of the environment and embrace innovation as a means of eliminating both. The Center believes helping animals helps us all. X: @TheHumaneCenter

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